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COUNTRY China

SUBJECT Prices of Draft Animals in the Central Shensi Plain

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1. The area to which the following information applies is the central Shensi plain, the region known as "Kwanchung" and comprising more than half the total area of Shensi Province.

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the principal medium of exchange in the sale of draft animals was the Mexican silver dollar. Its value in terms of US currency had by that time risen to roughly US\$.50 as a result of US inflation and the imminence of Communist occupation.

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CATTLE

2. Water buffaloes were very scarce in Kwanchung and "yellow cattle" were widely used for milling wheat and for drawing wagons and plows. Following are the main factors influencing the price of cattle in farmer-to-farmer sales in Kwanchung:

(a) Seven years was regarded as the strongest age. Most cattle were retired at ten years.

(b) The years two to four were held the best years for training an animal to a farmer's special needs, and cattle in this age bracket generally commanded the highest price.

(c) Some cattle are afraid of water and some are not. An animal without this fear was worth more because of his value in rice paddies and in drawing wagons across shallow streams.

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(d) Weight was of no importance in itself because of the Shensi Province law, which prohibited the slaughter of cattle for beef while still useful as draft animals. Skill of the kinds mentioned above, natural or acquired, was the important thing.

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## 3. Table of cattle prices in Kwanchung

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<u>Age</u>	<u>Price (US Dollars)</u>
Two to four	30 to 40
Four to eight	25 to 30
Under two and eight to ten	15 to 25
Over ten	Under 15 and sometimes almost nothing. Occasionally bought by very poor farmers who extract last ounce of strength and then slaughter.

A well paid farm laborer received a wage of US\$30 to 40 a year, the same as the price of the more desirable draft cattle. Most farm laborers received less, or an annual wage comparable to the price of a lower-grade draft animal. A common saying among Kwanchung farmers was "niu shih wo ti ming," which means "the cow is my life" and is a somewhat stronger statement in Chinese than in its English translation. The cattle were the tractors of the Kwanchung farmers who could afford them. They received at least as much care as did the farmer's own family. In some Kwanchung villages [ ] cows sheltered not only in the same house with the family but in a room at least as good as those occupied by the family members. Opulent farmers who could afford two or three cattle had stables for them.

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4. [ ] approximately one third of the farm families in Kwanchung owned one or more head of cattle but the great majority owned only one head. The remaining two thirds of the farm families owned no cattle. These farmers had to rent cattle for plowing and other jobs and such rentals could be arranged either with or without the owner. In general, the labor of a cow commanded about twice the wage of the labor of a good farm hand.

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HORSES AND MULES

5. Shensi Province, unlike the rest of north China, does not have many horses and depends mainly on cattle as draft animals. Farmers in all of north China refer to cattle as "small animals" and horses and mules as "big animals." A north China mule, dragging a plow, can sometimes do twice the work of a cow. North China horses and mules are frequently used to pull wagons and can do forty miles a day compared to a cow's 13 to 15 miles a day. Throughout north China, grown horses and mules are much more expensive than cattle and in Kwanchung the price of a mule was two to three times the price of a comparable cow on a relative scale of age and skill. The price of horses in Kwanchung was less standardized than that of either cattle or mules because the price was influenced by beauty and riding qualities as well as by the ability to work. In general, horses bought and sold in Kwanchung for work purposes alone cost a little less than mules, again on a relative scale of age and skill. The most expensive horses in Kwanchung, as in the rest of Shensi and everywhere in north China, were the tsou ma, the famous "walking horses" which can travel scores of miles a day under a rider sitting in the comfort of a sofa. It was the custom in Kwanchung to let old and exhausted mules and horses die natural deaths. Mules and horses are not regarded as edible in north China, a tradition for which the Buddhist religion is partly responsible. Occasionally, poor farmers in Kwanchung bought cheaply a horse or mule which had been pastured out and then worked the animal for a few months until it dropped dead.

DONKEYS

6. Donkeys were used in Kwanchung for milling and riding but not for plowing or pulling wagons. They were especially useful for transportation in the hilly area and the price of a donkey in good condition ranged between US\$15 and US\$25. Worked out donkeys were usually slaughtered and eaten in Kwanchung, as they are throughout north China.

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